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“Great Russian Culture”: Cancelling, Boycotting, Quarantine

In 2014, the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine, annexed the Crimea in March, and had occupied part of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions by September.

The World Order, as guaranteed by numerous international agreements, was wrecked. The aggressor was not punished. Ukraine was maligned, Kremlin propaganda inundated the media sphere with messages about “Ukrainian Nazis”, “the protection of the Russian language and Russian-speaking population” and “intra-Ukrainian conflict” (or “civil war”).

The question of “cancelling Russian culture” was not, and probably could not, be put on the international agenda at that time. The shock and pain caused by the unprovoked and abhorrent attack in Ukraine were many times greater in Ukraine than in Europe, but here in Ukraine the question of the cancellation of “Russian culture” was postponed, or at least got stuck at the proposal stage.

Russia’s imperial colonialism was both obvious and not. Decolonizing oneself is hard work. The imperial is always inscribed into the colonial body, and is often taken as one’s own. Formal liberation from colonialism does not guarantee immediate liberation from it, on many levels. Discursive linguistic constructions, mental geographical maps, cultural, historical, political hierarchies - these and other “markers” of imperialism had to be identified, analysed, and ultimately the optics themselves had to be altered. The victims of colonial violence always need time not only to see themselves as victims, but also to find the right path to freedom.

We have always been different from those who call themselves the “Russian people”. But part of us, a part to which I belonged for a long time, believed that in a significant way, we are alike. And that we should be alike because normal people are similar to one another.

Perhaps that is why in 2014 it still looked like there, in Russia, there really was a “great culture” and people who transmitted it: intellectuals, writers, artists and scientists. It looked like there was a civil society - we honestly judged them by our own standards. It looked as though a dialogue between us, who had suffered their aggression, and those who did not support this aggression, could stop the war and lead to a regime change. Ukraine was open to dialogue and believed in its potential.

In the spring of 2014, a congress of Russian-Ukrainian intelligentsia was held in Kyiv.¹ In the autumn of 2014, after the annexation of the Crimea and the occupation of eastern territories, a number of Russian public intellectuals participated in the Publishers’ Forum in Lviv. In 2015, a book “The Sky of This Summer. Stories of Ukrainian Writers” was published and could be purchased on Ozon.² It was both a gesture by Ukrainian intellectuals

¹ Russian and Ukrainian intellectuals will hold a congress against the “annexation of the Crimea”. March 14, 2014. (Російські та українські інтелігенти проведуть конгрес проти "анексії Криму". 14 березня 2014.) https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2014/03/140314_russian_intelligents_crimea_ag

² Vasylieva, Oleksandra. “Let Andruhovich be yours with Bandera, but let’s put him inside.” November 30, 2015 (Васильєва, Олександр. «Нехай буде ваш Андрухович з Бандерою, але давайте приберемо його всередину». 30 листопада 2015) <https://gazeta.ua/articles/culture/nehaj-bude-vash-andruhovich-z-banderoyu-ale-davajte-priberemo-jogo-vseredinu/662953>

and an attempt to explain to the Russians that their authorities were committing a crime. Gestures and attempts to explain what was happening continued. In 2017, the House of Free Russia was opened in Kyiv,³ and in subsequent years, Russian artists, actors, singers and musicians performed on the stages of Ukraine.⁴ In March 2022, posters of concerts by Russian performers were still hanging in the streets of Kyiv. And next to them were huge billboards with the words “Russian warship, go f**k yourself.”

... By constructing this explanatory outline and answering the question “why “Russian culture” was not cancelled in Ukraine after the annexation of the Crimea?” I am also looking for excuses for myself personally.

In 2014, after receiving a Russian prize, I dared to go to Moscow - in April, when the Russians were already in Donetsk, when the Russian special forces had taken over some small towns in the region. I dared to go to Moscow to say: the Russian language does not need protection; Ukraine is my country, and I am not asking you to protect me, a Russian speaker, from anyone at all.” There was a phrase in my speech: “I want Pushkin to defend us. Not Putin.” And there was also a phrase in which I expressed the belief that I could come to Moscow someday and talk solely about literature.⁵

I would not utter either of these phrases now. I am ashamed of them both.

This does not negate the fact that they were uttered, just as it does not negate the fact that the fantasy of a possible dialogue with Russians as the bearers of “great Russian culture” was long on the agenda of Ukrainian society. Or, to be more precise, the hope that Russian society as a whole would come to its senses.

However, beside hope, there was also something else. And it was difficult to define it. Embarrassing, painful and hard. “Any fully thought-out thought about life is capable of causing pain,” as the Ukrainian poet Vasyl Stus once said in conversation in the camps.⁶ This other issue was the colonised consciousness. Much has already been said and written about it. I can honestly repeat, after Marcelo Dascal that “my mind was colonised, “a mind developed of an “inherent acquiescence” to a superior or civilised one”⁷ And, following bell hooks, acknowledge that even when there is a sense that the process of decolonization seems to be proceeding, it is often very hard to speak of this experience (“those who feel we have decolonised our minds, often find it hard to speak our experience”)⁸

It is difficult to communicate this because it is a long and complicated story of how an empire forms its language and hierarchy of cultural values, and “dissolves” into the imperial body in order to physically survive or to gain privileges. It is difficult to talk about how the ban on the Ukrainian language, the destruction of Ukrainian intellectuals and the ethnographisation of Ukrainian, influenced my own blindness, my “tacit consent” to be part

³ House of Free Russia. Official site. <https://freerussiahouse.org/aboutus/>

⁴ Oxxxymiron concert in Kyiv: what the rapper said about Ukraine. December 16, 2017. - https://zn.ua/CULTURE/koncert-oxxyymiron-v-kieve-cto-reper-govoril-ob-ukraine-269497_.html, Andriy Makarevych gave a concert in Lviv. May 15, 2021. (Андрій Макаревич виступив з концертом у Львові. 15 травня 2021.) <https://www.unian.ua/lite/stars/andriy-makarevich-vistupiv-z-koncertom-u-lvovi-novini-lvova-11417395.html>

⁵ Russian Prize. Styazhkina Elena, Ukraine. April 22, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbnSBMA4mes>

⁶ Zabuzhko, Oksana. A broken branch sways in the evening... In memory of Vasyl Stus. November 11, 2021. <https://suspilne.media/167085-gojdaetsa-vecorami-zlamana-vit/>

⁷ Dascal, Marcelo, 2007, Colonizing and decolonizing minds. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, p. 4

⁸ hooks, bell. 1992, Black looks: race and representation, New York: Routledge, p. 2

of someone else's sphere, to accept history and reality not as it was, but as it was presented in Moscow's historical and political narrative. Even now it is not easy for me to "catch myself saying" something in this vein and not to say it: a word or expression escapes me, and is coloured with a Soviet cliché or a quotation from "great Russian literature", of which there are plenty for virtually any occasion. And this happens not because there is nothing Ukrainian, but because it was either stolen / "appropriated", banned, or regarded as a mere ethnographic fact.⁹

To take one example: the Institute for the History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, where I now work, was, until 1990, called the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. It seems like nothing much. Just one missing word: the stolen word, "Ukraine".

To look at oneself from the point of view of Moscow, to read oneself, to understand oneself, to love or not love from this angle: this is a favourite image of "great Russian literature". To look at oneself "from Moscow" is the story of the "little man".

And to look at oneself from one's own point of view, from the point of view of one's own people, is hard work. Work on oneself, which requires you to be ruthless and frank. And we must rely on the experiences of other nations in their inner decolonization. And it is also important, however bitter it may sound, "to remind [oneself] of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth".¹⁰ Steve Biko, a South African anti-apartheid activist, goes on to explain that "this is what we mean by an inward-looking process." The experience of Ukraine demonstrates that such a path is the path of all peoples, including those that are not (or not yet) identified as nations that have embarked on a path towards their own decolonisation.

For Putin, Ukrainians are "white trash"¹¹, according to journalist Terrell Starr. He puts it very well. He is an African-American who studies Russian imperialism and colonialism. Hence his ruthless accuracy. Hence the emphasis on what has made and (for many colonised peoples) still makes us invisible. On our white skin. Now it is no longer white. It is red, bright red, covered in streams of blood. Now that we have become non-white in such a terrible way, we have definitely earned a place among other peoples who are ridding themselves of colonial dependence...

A Comic or not Comic Film

Poland provided one of my first lessons in "reading culture" from the point of view of occupied/colonised peoples.

⁹ On the ethnographisation of the peoples and nationalities of the USSR see Francine Hirsch. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Cornell University Press, 2005)

¹⁰ Biko, Steve, 1987 *I Write What I Like: Steve Biko. A selection of his writings*. Edited by Aelred Stubbs C.R. Oxford Heinemann p.29

¹¹ Ukraine Through The Eyes of Reporters: Terrell Starr/ November, 29, 2022 <https://ukrainer.net/terrell-star/>

In 1975, at the Mosfilm studio, the director Eldar Ryazanov made the film *Irony of Fate or Enjoy Your Bath*, which became a favourite - iconic - film, practically a must-see on New Year's Eve. *Irony of Fate* for Soviet people is rather like *Home alone* or *Love Actually*. This 'must-see' status also arose from the fact that television was wholly state-owned at the time, which meant that state officials, controlled by the censorship and/or ideological committee of the Central Committee, were tasked with selecting all broadcast programs. After the fall of the Soviet Union, this film remained a favourite, and so was aired again and again on various channels, in response to public demand.

The plot of this comedy was constructed around mockery of the almost perfect similarity of houses, streets, neighbourhoods, entrances, apartments and even furniture in them. The uniformity of Soviet architectural space was part of a large general policy of unification, practiced not only in the USSR, but also in neighbouring countries that the Kremlin considered to be within its sphere of influence.¹² The plot is not complicated: on New Year's Eve, a Moscow doctor and his friends go to a bathhouse, where they get rather merry, then his companions (instead of another equally tipsy friend) send him off to Leningrad by plane. He takes a taxi and gives the driver his address, upon which it turns out that in Leningrad there is an identical address, house and apartment. His key also fits the lock. The main character goes to bed. When the female owner of the flat arrives, he spends ages explaining to her that he is at home. Finally, the Moscow guest sobers up, falls in love with the heroine, simultaneously ends her relationship with her fiancé (a decent, but dreary man), and flies home to Moscow. The happy ending comes when the heroine follows the hero to Moscow and opens his door with her own key.

The heroine of this film was played by the Polish actress Barbara Brylska. In an interview, she said that Poles did not like the film. But she didn't say why. In fact, Warsaw's view of this unaffected plot was completely different.

The man in all honesty believes that he is at home. Because everything looks familiar, and everything that looks familiar is his. Details are not important. There is enough similarity for him to make it his own. Especially since he is drunk. That is why he cannot be held accountable for his actions, just as he could not resist when his 'friends-commanders' sent him to an unfamiliar city, especially since the city does not appear to be unfamiliar. Arriving at his destination, he complains that someone has rearranged the furniture, then scatters his things and goes to bed, without questioning whose flat he is in. When the owner of the flat returns, he requires that she prove her ownership, threatens to call the police, laughs at her, and imitates her. When he sobers up a bit, he asks her to lend him some money for his return trip, and, without waiting for her permission, eats some food from her festive table, while at the same time poking fun at her cooking skills, her life decisions and her choice of partner. At some point, the female owner of the flat finds the strength to give him a slap.

And then the worst thing imaginable happens. No, he does not rape the woman. He makes her fall in love with him. And she leaves a good, prim and proper, sensitive and decent man (according to the film's logic, decency equals dullness). Then, having uprooted her life, the Muscovite - like a real winner who has made his mark on a foreign land - goes home. His time is up, all 'targets' are met. Everything that could be destroyed was destroyed.

¹² *The Socialist city: spatial structure and urban policy*, 1979 / edited by R. A. French and F. E. Ian Hamilton. Chichester ; New York : Wiley

What happens next follows Steve Biko's scenario - she becomes an accomplice in a crime directed against herself. She follows him in the hope that the destroyer is the best of men and can bring her happiness.

The spectator from Warsaw saw this film starring a Polish actress as an ode to Soviet imperialism. As an echo of Pushkin's support of the suppression of the Polish rebellion: "Who will come out on top in an unequal quarrel: a braggart Pole, or loyal Russian?" Nor is it surprising that the Poles, whose state was shattered at least twice by Russian (Soviet) imperialism, always detected an imperialistic accent in even apparently innocent things. Eva Thompson very convincingly demonstrates that one of the wide-spread practices of empires is to encrypt imperial superiority in messages which seem to have no direct relevance to politics.¹³ Deciphering these messages can be akin to the work of a sapper whose minefield is littered with not one, but two or three, layers of dangerous explosives.

Honesty

Dealing with a colonial consciousness requires honesty. But for this, the words are often lacking. The first feeling of my personal decolonisation was shame. Alongside it - almost immediately - there was a huge sense of guilt.

My shame at first was very personal. Speculations about who I was in the past eventually ran into painful questions: did I exist at all - in Hamlet's classic meaning? To what extent was the choice of what I did a conscious choice? To what extent were my conceptions and feelings, my ideas and views my own? It is shameful, sad and daunting to admit that my own thoughts were not critical views of the world, but artificially cultivated fruits of "great Russian culture". My brain worked like a piano: pressing a certain key was followed by the correct and expected sound. "If a poet, it had to be Pushkin, if a writer, Tolstoy, if a composer, Tchaikovsky..." The Soviet school was Russian. And imperial, because Pushkin was regarded as the summit, a yard-stick against which the skill of Byron and Burns was measured, and then those of all other, contemporary modern poets around the world. It was assumed that no one had ever been able to match the genius of Pushkin.

Guilt - along with shame - was directed outward: into the past and into the present. Feelings of guilt before Ukrainian, Polish, Lithuanian poets, writers, artists, musicians who were physically killed¹⁴ and/or symbolically cast aside in the face of Pushkin's mastery. And before those of my contemporaries, whose brain did not act like the Soviet imperial piano. Yevhen Sverstiuk, Myroslav Marynovych, Oksana Zabuzhko, Mykola Riabchuk, Father Borys Gudziak and Olia Hnatiuk....¹⁵ The list contains many names and surnames of

¹³ Ewa Thomson. 2000, *Imperial knowledge : Russian literature and colonialism*. Westport, Conn. : Greenwood Press viii, 239 pages

¹⁴ Sandarmokh, a place in Karelia, where in 1937 NKVD executed 1111 people, among them were the most prominent representatives of the Ukrainian intellectual elite: Les Kurbas, an innovative theater director and creator of the Berezil Theater; writer Mykola Kulish, philosopher and novelist Valerian Pidmohylny, poets, writers, and translators Mykola Zerov, Pavlo Fylypovych, Valerian Polishchuk, Hryhorii Epik, Myroslav Irchan, Marko Vorony, Mikhailo Kozoris, Oleksa Slisarenko, Mykhailo Yalovy, geographer Stepan Rudnytskyi, historian Matvii Yavorskyi and many others.

¹⁵ *Ukrainian Dissidents: An Anthology of Texts (Ukrainian Voices)/* Edit. by Sinchenko, Oleksii. Ibidem Press, 2021; Hnatiuk Ola. *Courage and Fear (Ukrainian Studies)/* Trans. Ewa Siwak. Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2019. *Academic Studies Press*, 2020; Riabchuk, Mykola/ *Gleichschaltung: Authoritarian Consolidation in Ukraine 2010–2012*. Yuri Marchenko, 2012; Zabuzhko, Oksana *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*, translated by Nina Shevchuk-Murray. Las Vegas: AmazonCrossing 2012; Marynovich Myroslav. *How*

people who wrote and talked a great deal, tirelessly, generously and rationally about the destroyed, forgotten and forbidden culture, who made Ukraine Ukrainian even when they paid for it with their lives. For a long time, I could not look these people in the eye. I don't think they judged me or people like me. But in order to look them in the eye, I needed first to forgive myself, at least a little bit.

Accent

In the autumn of 2014, at the international forum of publishers in Lviv, the president of Lithuanian PEN, Herkus Kunčius, said during one of the coffee breaks: “You don't know Russians...”. I thought that by then I, who had fled occupied Donetsk, already did know.

And that is why I began to pay attention not only the “street” accent which appeared in Donetsk in the spring of 2014 but also the intellectual accent, the accent of “great Russian culture”.

My city was violated by Chechen Kadyrovites and “Russian volunteers”; in Crimea they arrested and kidnapped Crimean Tatars right on the street. Those who had been kidnapped were later found dead. The good Russian writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya seemed to condemn the annexation of the Crimea. But only seemingly. In an interview with Ukrainian journalists, she said: “the Crimea is an unfortunate place, there will be struggles over it for a long time to come. It is stupid to say that it belongs to someone, it is international land. The corridor between European civilisation and Russia, through which so much passed”;¹⁶ “there really are many people who would like to be part of Russia, and not Ukraine – I mean the Crimea, as a territory, should have a government that would look after its development, welfare and conservation”.¹⁷

That sweet, sweet humanitarian liberal discourse. Dostoevsky's “tears of a child”, which render invisible “unfortunate places” in Russia, as well as those which want to be independent such as Chechnya.

The accent of “great Russian culture” could be heard clearly in Ukraine, and not only there. For many of its admirers, the empire's vanguard liberal detachment, together with Russian propaganda and the corruption of European officials, created a stable platform, on which the international outlook on Ukraine and the Crimea was based for eight long years: the ideas that “everything isn't so simple”, “the Crimea is historically Russian territory”, “separatist regions”, “internal Ukrainian conflict”.

Meanwhile, the accent of “great Russian culture” in the West sounded cheerfully throughout all these years. From 2016 to 2018, Zakhar Prilepin “a classic of Russian literature”, was the deputy commander of a special forces battalion which specialised in working with the personnel of the “army” of the so-called “Donetsk People's Republic”. In

Ukraine grew wings: Speeches, articles, reports, interviews (2018–2021). Kyiv: Spirit and Letter, 2021.
Archbishop Borys Gudziak: 2022 Commencement Address. May 15, 2022.

<https://news.nd.edu/news/archbishop-borys-gudziak-2022-commencement-address/> и др..

¹⁶ “Neither Ukrainian nor Russian”: the writer Ulitskaya explained whose the Crimea really is. September 29, 2014 <https://popcorn.politeka.net/273272-ne-ukrainskiy-ili-rossiyskiy-pisatelnica-ulickaya-obyasnila-chey-krym-na-samom-dele>

¹⁷ Sergatskova, Katerina. Lyudmila Ulitskaya: I don't think the Crimea will flourish under Russia. April 29, 2014 <https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2014/04/29/165498/>

one of the interviews from those years, he said of the battalion in which he was deputy commander that, “when all the documents are checked, they’ll see that the most people died where my battalion was stationed”.¹⁸

From 16th to 19th March 2018, Zakhar Prilepin was a guest on the Russian stand at the Paris Book Fair. In that year, Russia was in fact an honoured guest at this festival of humanism. It was “a political gesture in the face of tense relations between Moscow and the West”.¹⁹ Moscow, which was at war in Ukraine, and the West, which at the time preferred to be deaf to the imperial accent, and to the sound of shells fired at the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

Differences

There were significant differences between how “great Russian culture” was consumed within the USSR and in the West. In fact, most Soviet schoolchildren probably didn’t read all the set texts on their school curriculum. Firstly, they were bored of it. Secondly, how to read and what to note was already prescribed in their textbooks. And it was easier to creatively summarise a textbook than to read weighty tomes with boring descriptions of nature, weather and the ‘spiritual turmoil’ of the main characters. In the end, most schoolchildren simply reproduced the necessary summaries from their textbooks and got their grades.

Those who had questions could not count on receiving logical answers. One of my classmates asked the teacher: “Why did Onegin kill his friend Lensky? Couldn’t he have just not turned up to the duel?²⁰ And why did Gerasim drown the dog he loved?²¹ Rogozhin loved Nastasya Filippovna? He did love her. Why did he kill her, then?²² Why did Karandyshev kill Larisa, when he also loved her?”²³

The teacher simply sighed and replied: “That’s how things were in those days.”

It’s always ‘those days’ in Russia. Culture, though not only culture, carries the messages: “to kill a friend and miss him after his murder is ok”, “to love a woman and kill her because she does not love in return or loves wrongly is ok”, “to kill something smaller and weaker is ok”, “to kill a foreigner just because he is different and does not want to “belong to Russia is ok”. Pangs of remorse are a hallmark of Russian culture. But they come after a murder. Always after a murder. And never before it.

To those questions which my classmate once asked, I will add my own - which I then kept to myself. “Why did all the murders of defenceless people succeed, but the deliberate murder of Napoleon, which Pierre Bezukhov planned, did not? why wasn’t there even an attempt?” Pangs of remorse are a hallmark of Russian culture. It should be added here that

¹⁸ Best-Selling Russian Author Boasts Of 'Killing Many' In Ukraine's Donbas . August 18,2019

<https://www.rferl.org/a/best-selling-russian-author-boasts-of-killing-many-in-ukraine-s-donbas/30115450.html>

¹⁹ Zakhar Prilepin: “Russia treats Europe beautifully, lovingly, adoringly.” 18 March 2018

<https://www.rfi.fr/ru/obshchii/20180316-rassказы-o-rodine-i-frantsii-dmitriya-glukhovskogo>

²⁰ Pushkin, Alexander. “Eugene Onegin”

²¹ Turgenev, Ivan. “Moo-moo”

²² Dostoevsky, Fyodor. “The Idiot”

²³ Ostrovsky, Alexander. “Dowry”

they come not after the killing of tyrants and executioners, but after the killing of weak, friendly and defenceless people.

In late Soviet society, all rituals, as Aleksey Yurchak correctly observes, were fossilised. It was much easier and more sensible to reproduce them without going into detail (and therefore without reading “Great Russian” works). Following Mikhail Bakhtin, Yurchak calls this behaviour “outsideness”²⁴. And it is precisely this “outside”, an existence outside of all paradigms but also simultaneously within their rituals that explains the unexpectedness of the Soviet Union’s collapse for its citizens. Now that the war is changing the colour of the world, pushing it out of the comfortable grey scale with its relativistic conviction that “not everything is so simple”, I argue that “outsideness” remains an interesting theoretical construct, but it cannot justify a conscious lie, consent to submission, or a vision of oneself as ‘a little man who does not decide anything.’ Not deciding anything, but still killing. Living outside is a good excuse. But it doesn’t suit me anymore.

Shame and guilt are more painful feelings, but they’re much more important. It is they that give clarity to the distinction between good and evil. While I “lived outside” and thereby agreed to be “little”, but was nonetheless complicit in the the “big Soviet Russian” narrative, others died in camps, defending Ukraine’s right to its own culture and independence. When the Ukrainian poet Vasyl Stus died in a punishment cell in November 1985, “perestroika” had already been announced.

While I lived “outside”, the Kremlin waged war against the Afghan people. We Ukrainians, are of course partly to blame for this participation. Colonised peoples have always participated in imperial wars waged by empires. Now Buryats, Tuvinians and Yakuts are fighting against Ukraine in the Russian army. Now they are our enemies. But when together with freedom, they start to feel shame and guilt, we may be able to accept their apologies. But that will happen much, much later.

The term “the West” represents a large presumption, simplification and generalisation. I use it, in the awareness that the modern West also includes Eva Thompson and Timothy Snyder and Ann Applebaum and Andreas Umland and Andrew Wilson and Uilleam Blacker, and Marco Puleri and many other intellectuals, who discovered and are discovering Ukraine, making it visible and understandable.

But in general, the problem of the hierarchy of knowledge, the process of selecting what is important and unimportant, the choice of lens, the dependence of knowledge on who writes or speaks, what kind of material is considered relevant, the epistemological imperialism is well studied and understood, thanks in part to developments in colonial and post-colonial studies.²⁵ World history and the selection of texts belonging to “great

24 Alexei Yurchak explains: “The term “outside” in the English translation does not capture the Russian term *vnyenakhodimost'* coined by Bakhtin in the original. *Vnye-nakhodimost'* is a compound of *vnye* (inside/outside) and *nakhodimost'* (locatedness). Whereas “outside” suggests a spatial location beyond a border, Bakhtin’s term emphasizes a relationship between inside and outside. Therefore Bakhtin’s original text would be more precisely translated thus: “a relation of intense *vnyenakhodimost'* of the author to all moments of the hero, *vnyenakhodimost'* of space, time, value, and meaning” (Bakhtin 2000,40), emphasizing an intense dialogic interrelationship between the author and hero positions, and the impossibility of dividing or splitting them into two separate selves” (Alexei Yurchak (2005). *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton University Press. p.133)

²⁵ Tlostanova, Madina V. & Mignolo Walter D. (2012). *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* Transoceanic Studies Columbus: The Ohio State University Press

literatures” is created by universities, publishing houses, Western European and North American media. A word or an image can spring up anywhere, but only in this space do they acquire audibility and visibility. Russia (in all its roles, from the Empire to the USSR and back) was “chosen” for such prominence. The significant Other, the Mysterious Other, Perilous Other, (Un)tamed Other... For Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Georgia, Tatarstan, the prominence of this Other meant that our own culture was safely hidden or buried.

Eva Thompson rightly focused on the traditional Western confusion between “belonging to the Russian state” (‘rossiiskii’) and “belonging to the Russian ethnos” (‘russkii’) and/or between “Russian” and “Soviet”. This confusion almost always led to ignoring, suppressing or misidentifying national identities which were not Russian in ethnic origin, language, culture, but were part of the Russian state as a result of conquest. Russian rapacious colonial wars were also not clearly identified as colonial. “Great Russian literature” with their plots about wars in the Caucasus contributed much to this blindness.²⁶

Since 2014, this general trend that has persisted in relation to Russian culture has been formulated as “culture beyond politics.” In 2022, a new trend which was most clearly defined in a letter from the German PEN Center, claimed that: “The enemy is Putin, not Pushkin”.²⁷ I recognised my own words spoken in 2014. But this latter phrase was uttered and written down on 6th March 2022, when it was no longer possible to regard the war as a “civil conflict”, when Russians bombed Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Volnovakha, Mariupol, Odesa, Mykolaiv ... When firms and brands, despite the possible loss of profits, left Russia en masse, when “Bucha” had already taken place, where crimes had occurred that became known to the world after the liberation of the Kyiv region.

“Not Pushkin”, quite right, “not Pushkin”. But scholars of Pushkin (*pushkinisty*). Sometimes we call the invaders just that, to show the connection between Pushkin and the killings of civilians in Ukraine. It’s a bitter but honest joke. Pushkin is not to blame, but it was his images and quotations which were used by the invaders to “decorate” the seized Kherson. On one of the billboards, near Pushkin’s face, were his words: “Ivan Abramovich ... built Kherson in 1779. His decrees are still respected in the Crimea, where in 1821 I saw old people who kept his memory vividly alive.” Pushkin is the mark of the “Russian world”. The invaders turned him into a kind of mark, as many mammals do when marking territory as their own. On Pushkinskaya Street and on Lermontov Street in Irpin, Russians shot girls and women, and then drove tanks over them.²⁸ Admirers of “great Russian culture” mocked the people. The names of the streets – “holy names for the Russian people” - did not stop anyone.

²⁶About this: Susan Layton. 1995. Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy. Cambridge University Press, Year

²⁷ Press release from PEN-Germany on solidarity with Ukraine, insufficient sanctions and false boycott calls. The enemy is Putin, not Pushkin. March, 6. 2022. https://www.pen-deutschland.de/de/2022/03/06/the-enemy-is-putin-not-pushkin/?fbclid=IwAR2NdBQqe8J8ytUkGioHADSTQDbIe9VieF7S2QiVy47DN2t0CfCGEUxM_Gs

²⁸ Orlova, Violetta. Invaders shot girls and women and ran them over with tanks - the mayor of Irpen (video). 28 March 2022

https://www.unian.net/war/irpen-okkupanty-rasstrelivali-zhenshchin-i-ezdili-po-nim-na-tankah-video-novosti-kiyeva11771215.html?_gl=1*1ovvpvq*_ga*MTkwMDcyMjgzMy4xNjc1MzIzNjEz*_ga_P6EEJX21DY*MTY3NTk0MzA5NS4zLjAuMTY3NTk0MzA5NS42MC4wLjA.*_ga_JLSK4Y8K67*MTY3NTk0MzA5NS4zLjAuMTY3NTk0MzA5NS42MC4wLjA

Are these two examples sufficient to explain why a dialogue with Russian culture is impossible for Ukrainians today, and why we no longer want to see any monuments to Pushkin or streets named after him in Ukraine?

Andriy Kurkov, President of the Ukrainian PEN Center, put it this way: “Now we may only find complete understanding among residents of Sarajevo, Dubrovnik and elderly inhabitants of Coventry, a city turned to ruins by German bombers during WWII. I have not found any information about discussions concerning a reconciliation of Soviet and German writers during the Second World War. There were none. As long as the war in Ukraine continues, there will be no such discussions between Ukrainian and Russian writers”²⁹

Serhiy Zhadan has captured those first days and months in which there was no strength to join in any kind of intellectual discussions: ‘What does war change first? One’s sense of time, one’s sense of space. The outline of one’s perspective, the outline of temporal progression changes very quickly. People in a war-torn space try not to plan for the future or think too much about what the world will be like tomorrow. What’s happening to you here and now is all that matters, just the people and things that will be with you tomorrow morning - tops. That’s if you survive and wake up. Staying alive and pushing forward another twelve hours or so is the most important task at hand.’³⁰

But the armed forces of Ukraine gradually gave us strength and a sense of security. Words slowly returned. The German PEN claim turned out to be a trap not for us, but for Western intellectuals. A trap which made Westplaining visible, criticised and even shamed³¹, together with one of its basic components - the symbolic Pushkin, whose very existence seemed to justify both the greatness of Russia and its rapacious interests. As Kateryna Botanova put it: ‘the war that Ukraine is fighting today is a two-fold decolonial war. On the main front, it is a brutal and unjust war against Russia, an outdated empire that cannot let go of its imperial territorial and cultural claims, and is ready to eradicate the whole country for them. And, on the other, not deadly yet crucial, it is a decolonial stand against the West that still holds the reins to the power to naming, (re)presenting and deciding whose sovereignty is worth fighting for.’³²

Powerless powerful literature

For a long time in Russian imperial discourse, Ukrainians who continued their struggle for independence were called the followers of Mazepa³³ or “Mazepians”. It is noteworthy that even in the 21st century Mazepa was still anathema in the churches of the

29 White or Black – President of PEN Ukraine in reply to PEN Germany’s letter .8.03.2022

<https://pen.org.ua/en/bile-i-chorne-vidpovid-prezydenta-ukrayinskogo-pen-na-lyst-nimetskogo-pen>

30 Poetry After Bucha: Serhiy Zhadan on Ukraine, Russia, and the Demands War Makes of Language" There’s no such thing as peace without justice." <https://lithub.com/poetry-after-bucha-serhiy-zhadan-on-ukraine-russia-and-the-demands-war-makes-of-language/>

31 Aliaksei Kazharski. Explaining the “Westplainers”: Can a Western scholar be an authority on Central and Eastern Europe? July 19, 2022 <https://ukrainian-studies.ca/2022/07/19/explaining-the-westplainers-can-a-western-scholar-be-an-authority-on-central-and-eastern-europe/>

32 Kateryna Botanova. A Blanket of Snow. [https://isc.lviv.ua/en/blog/botanova-](https://isc.lviv.ua/en/blog/botanova-ukrzriz/?fbclid=IwAR10iCebfs9OpWMBRIX8JWhjPnLNvPzJQtnyyUOXb0Vc4TNUO186HkRqVes)

[ukrzriz/?fbclid=IwAR10iCebfs9OpWMBRIX8JWhjPnLNvPzJQtnyyUOXb0Vc4TNUO186HkRqVes](https://isc.lviv.ua/en/blog/botanova-ukrzriz/?fbclid=IwAR10iCebfs9OpWMBRIX8JWhjPnLNvPzJQtnyyUOXb0Vc4TNUO186HkRqVes)

33 Ivan Mazepa was a Ukrainian hetman. Mazepa, realising that Muscovy had broken the promise made in 1654 regarding the status of Ukrainian lands, took the opportunity to form an alliance with the Swedish king Charles the Twelfth in order to restore the independence of Ukraine as a result of a possible victory in the Northern War. (Manning, Clarence Augustus. 1957. Hetman of Ukraine. Ivan Mazeppa. New York, Bookman Associates)

Moscow Patriarchate. In the Soviet Union, this name was also widely used, but mainly in execution or exile sentences for “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism.” First, the Soviets “sold” Petlyura to the outside world with a biography that terrified the democratic intelligentsia of Europe. The writer Mikhail Bulgakov had a hand in this in the novel *The White Guard*, and in the story *I Killed*. After World War II, Ukrainians who continued to fight for independence, including those who simply spoke Ukrainian, began to be called “Banderites”. Bandera himself was declared a Nazi, despite the fact that between 1942-1944 he was a prisoner in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

But now I’m not talking about Petliura or Bandera as historical politicians in a difficult time and difficult decisions. I’m talking about why we in the imperial “export version” ceased to be “Mazepians”. In January 1918, the Sun newspaper published an article “An Independent Ukraine”, which welcomed the independence of Ukraine and explained to its readers what Ukraine and its people are, and why Ukraine refused to recognise Bolshevik control in its territory: “They are a strong, hard-headed people, and the qualities that led them to fight on rather than accept such an ignoble peace were the same that kept them steadfast in their struggle for independence. They never lost sight of that ideal”.

But what was important for me lay in something else: so that readers better understand the nature of Ukrainians and the duration of our struggle for independence, the editors of the newspaper mentioned a single name - Mazepa, reminding the reader that it was after his defeat at Poltava that Ukraine was left the vassal of Russia, and Ukrainians in the Tsar’s realm were renamed as South Russians or Little Russians.³⁴

Why Mazepa?

Because of Lord Byron. Because Lord Byron wrote a poem “Mazeppa” - a poem about a Romantic, strong character who fought with all his might for national liberation. Byron was not mentioned in the article, just as Victor Hugo or Franz Liszt with his symphonic poem “Mazeppa” were not mentioned...

But this was not necessary: the editors understood both the popularity of the texts and the sympathies of the authors expressed in them.

And yes, of course, this is about the hierarchy of knowledge, in which Pushkin with his poem “Mazeppa” lost, and Ukraine, in the eyes of Byron and Hugo, won.

We could not become “Mazepians”. Because then the world would know us as a people who did not give up over many centuries. The world had to either not know us at all (“one nation”), or know us as ultra nationalists and traitors. Pushkin’s poetic anathema to Mazepa and Ukraine - in the long run - won. But not because he was read and loved, but because Ukrainian culture was either shot or stolen.

Daniel Defoe and Margaret Mitchell provided images with which one can describe Ukrainians and Ukraine as part of the Russian empire and the USSR. Serhiy Sumlenny in 2022 proposed to “read Ukraine” in the novel *Gone with the Wind*: “Ukrainians in the

³⁴ The Sun, Saturday, January, 5, 1918 - <https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn83030431/1918-01-05/ed-1/seq-6.pdf>; Editorials. An Independent Ukraine, Redux. March, 26, 2022 <https://www.nysun.com/article/an-independent-ukraine-redux>; Special Poem of the Day: ‘Mazeppa’ March, 27, 2022 - <https://www.nysun.com/article/special-poem-of-the-day-mazeppa>

Russian empire and in the Soviet Union were akin to blacks in racist America. They were claimed to be “dirty”, “stupid”, their language was mocked, their national clothing and accent were used in comedies (aka “blackface”). If you want to imagine a portrait of a “good” Ukrainian in Soviet propaganda, think of Mammy from the *Gone with the wind* - a loyal servant, who knows her place”³⁵. The same thought was formulated by Mykola Riabchuk long before Sumlenny: Ukraine was to Russia as Friday was to Robinson Crusoe. Robinson “loved” Friday only as long as Friday followed his rules. But as soon as Friday declared his right to live by his own rules, he immediately became a hated enemy. The only significant difference, Ryabchuk notes, was the fact that Ukrainians were white and their “black skin” was not their actual skin, but the Ukrainian language.³⁶ The Soviets considered it rural, comic, “an illiterate spoiled Russian”.

And as soon as the Ukrainian language was saturated with new terminology and words that were not at all like Russian, the KGB immediately turned its attention to it and its speakers. Another purge of a new generation of Ukrainian writers and poets happened at the end of 1960s and beginning of the 1970s. The dynamic, academic, intellectually rich, living Ukrainian language became one of the signals for repression. A KGB report said: “In recent years, in the Kyiv Republican press, certain Polish-Galician gibberish successfully competes with the literary Ukrainian language. We call it the “Bandera language”, “words, collocations, historically close to the Russian language and in fact primordially Slavic, are being replaced by hardly known, and at times even unverified dictionaries, Polonisms, Gallicisms, Germanisms. A certain “elitist” language is being born, a language for the elite, cut off from the language of the people”; “Here philology ends and politics begins.”³⁷ A policy of repression, I’ll add. It is striking how the denial of the development of the Ukrainian language in the 1970s echoes the text of the Valuev Circular of 1863,³⁸ which stated that “a separate Little Russian language never existed, does not exist, and shall not exist, and their tongue as used by commoners is nothing but Russian corrupted by the influence of Poland”. It was impossible to cancel the Ukrainian language in the 1970s-1980s, since this contradicted the Soviet national doctrine, but to simplify, emasculate, remove “incorrect words”: that seemed quite achievable.

Cancellation or a Few Important “No’s”

The “cancellation of Russian culture is my own personal project and my personal strategy. But this cancellation project is also a public, Ukrainian one. Ours. More than a thousand streets named after Pushkin is a lot for any country. For Ukraine, after mass rapes at “poetic crossroads”, it is simply impossible. Pushkin in Ukraine has become a screen for genocide. Here, in our present, there must be a full stop.

³⁵ Sergej Sumlenny. Eastern Europe expert, Founder of European Resilience Initiative Center. <https://twitter.com/sumlenny/status/1273280773936775168>

³⁶ Riabchuk, Mykola The Ukrainian “Friday” and the Russian “Robinson”: The Uneasy Advent of Postcoloniality. *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 44 (2010) 7–24 https://shron1.chtyvo.org.ua/Riabchuk/The_Ukrainian_Friday_and_the_Russian_Robinson_The_Uneasy_Advent_of_Postcoloniality_anhl.pdf?PHPSESSID=d615cgo8no0df9df2rj9csvgmv3

³⁷ State archive of the Security Service of Ukraine. Fund.16, inventory 1, file.996, Sheets 57, 59

³⁸ The Valuev Circular of 18 July 1863 was a decree issued by Pyotr Valuev, Minister of Internal Affairs of the Russian Empire, by which many publications in the Ukrainian language were forbidden, except for belles-lettres works. The Ems Ukaz or Ems Ukase, was a secret decree of Emperor Alexander II of Russia issued on May 18, 1876, banning the use of the Ukrainian language in print except for reprinting old documents. The ukaz also forbade the import of Ukrainian publications and the staging of plays or lectures in Ukrainian.

And in our recent past, during the years of independence, the texts of Russian literature have always been included in school curricula. No one in Ukraine burns books or throws them out of libraries now. No, that's not quite right: no one in Ukraine, except for Russian invaders, burns libraries, books, museums and theatres. No, even now no one forbids Russian opposition writers to come to Kyiv and give lectures.

Quite another matter is the fact that these lectures on "Russian culture" have ceased to be interesting. Now the Russian opposition writer Dmitry Bykov is writing a book about Zelensky, which will be entitled "V.Z."³⁹ And in this act of writing, I, again and again, hear a very marked imperialist accent. And a blatant disregard for the feelings of Ukrainians, who are pained to see the letters Z, V, O, the main symbols of the war and Russian weapons, instead of the capital letters of the president's name.

The cancellation of the "great Russian culture" for me and for all Ukrainians is a way out of the Egyptian desert. An exit to the world where we, Ukrainians, have always been, are and will be amongst other peoples.

Instead of thousands of streets named after Pushkin, the country should have thousands of streets named after writers and poets killed in honour of the triumph of "great Russian culture." This is normal. It was abnormal that such streets did not exist previously.

I don't feel sorry for "great Russian culture". The best thing that can be done now to preserve the impression of "great Russian culture" is silence. A boycott in which the overtly Nazi voices of intellectuals and their shamelessly satanic interpretations of the past, present and future will not be heard.

When the dead bodies of adults and children were found on the streets, in yards and in cars in the liberated Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel, international cultural projects did not stop. This is right. What was wrong was Russian participation in them. Russian participation in exhibitions and book festivals, scholarly conferences, opera and ballet productions... Their participation, the general discussion on the topic "Is culture to blame?" and our cries, which seemed indecent to many Western cultural figures. We yelled, very loudly and sometimes incoherently. We showed horrific footage of torture, photographs of toys covered in blood, frozen eyes of mothers at the graves of children, we showed fires, ruins, explosions. We wanted there to be no "Russian culture", neither near us, or anywhere at all. "It's like sanctions," we said. "Why do businesses care about their reputation, but culture does not? How is this possible?"

Some institutions responded, some did not, continuing to insist that "it is all Putin's fault, not Pushkin's." But Wagner is not played in Israel... If it is normal for someone in the world to listen to music that is played against the background of the screams of the hundreds killed in the Mariupol Theater, we cannot do anything about it. I will not respect it, but now will simply know that such a choice also exists, that it is acceptable for a part of Western civilisation.

³⁹ Dmitry Bykov: V and Z are the initials of Vladimir Zelensky. They designate the target. March 17, 2022. <https://gordonua.com/bulvar/news/dmitriy-bykov-v-i-z-eto-inicialy-vladimira-zelenskogo-eto-oboznachenie-misheni-1600335.html>

Now that the war continues into its tenth year, I am still not ready, either to enter into discussions with Russian intellectuals, or to turn to the “classics”. I, we, do not have the time and energy for this. Ultimately, it makes no sense, because there is nothing to discuss. With them, no.

Quarantine

Can culture be judged or not? Does culture have the benefit of the doubt? Including Nazi culture? And German culture, which was appropriated by the Nazis and declared fundamental by the Fuhrer and his followers? I am not sure. But the Lithuanian Minister of Culture, quoting the writer Kristina Sabalyauskaite,⁴⁰ proposed that Russian culture be subjected not to a trial, but to quarantine.⁴¹ And that seems to me like a good word and a good proposal.

Russian culture is sick. The last sick culture in Europe was the Ottoman Empire. Over time, it recovered: it ceased to be an empire and became Turkey. Among its many writers is Orhan Pamuk, thoughtful, honest and exacting towards himself. A Nobel Prize laureate. Incidentally, there are reports that he is considering the possibility of including some works of Ukrainian literature in his student course at Columbia University.⁴²

A sick culture is a good metaphor: it provides much food for thought. Sickness means viruses, bacteria, a lack of white blood cells, or vice versa, an excess of red blood cells, such that blood starts to flow before you start reading, watching, listening to it. An ailing culture can be infectious and deadly.

But this is no reason to humanely destroy it without trying to understand the illness, in order to avoid future relapses and epidemics. This approach requires serious anti-epidemic measures. First of all, temporary isolation with limited access. Entrance is only permitted to doctors and junior medical staff. Masks, goggles, gloves, hazmat suits are a must. Who will be this doctor? Who will dare? I don't know, but goggles at least provide a guarantee that the lenses can be changed. And, finally, one must study the dangerous viruses pervading the pages of books, opera librettos, film scripts, and the architectonics of visual objects.

I am not a doctor fit to treat “great Russian culture”. But I have still managed to jot down some quasi-medical notes. Perhaps they will be useful for professional “virologists”. Probably not. For me they are important because they are part of my work on my own process of decolonization. And the personal is still political.

I think that “great Russian culture” has collapsed. Or, on the contrary, it has achieved precisely those results which were encoded in it, read, nurtured, instilled by the education system, propaganda, Russian intellectuals over generations. The message of humanity and compassion failed (if there was one at all). The teaching of evil, acquiescence (“non-resistance”) and the habit of evil, the ontologisation of evil as a “special Russian path” won.

⁴⁰ Kristina Sabaliauskaitė. <http://www.sabaliauskaite.com/>

⁴¹ The head of the Ministry of Culture of Lithuania proposed to quarantine Russian culture. January 9, 2023 (Глава Мінкульту Литви запропонував помістити російську культуру в карантин. 9 січня 2023) <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/01/9/7384025/>

⁴² Dialogues on War/ Діалоги про війну. Sophia Andrukhovych and Orhan Pamuk. 8 липня 2022. Український ПЕН-центр <https://www.facebook.com/penclubua/videos/1138464693407141/>

The question “to be or not to be”, the canonical question of Western literature, philosophy, did not arise and never formed into a tradition. A readiness to “endure the blows of fate, the abuse of a tyrant, the contempt of the ignorant” : this is a choice made by “great Russian culture” by default and without discussion. Made in solidarity, by generations of writers and poets. Hamletism is ridiculed as not viable “on Russian soil.” Ridiculed, humiliated and devalued by the lily-livered murder of an elderly woman, the purpose of which is to solve the question “Am I a trembling creature or have I the right to do it?” : a cynical paraphrase of “to be or not to be”

Compassion for the “little man” turned out to be fiction, because the “little” man never gave rise, in turn, to a “big, good man”. This produced a culture founded on the impossibility of realising a positive scenario and of growth and change in the personality. The Canon emerged, permitting the “little man’s” meanness and betrayal, and sympathising with him at every step. Justification of the humiliated, justification of crimes, a lack of will, non-existence and self-destruction, the enjoyment of hatred and fear (both one’s own and others’).

“Great Russian culture” has never answered the question of who the Russians are. For centuries it has instead reproduced the paranoid anxiety of an uncertain (or unclear) identity: the constant search for an answer to the question “who are we?” and exasperated, outwardly directed “yes, we are Scythians, yes, we are Asians, with slanting and greedy eyes!”.⁴³ The threats to identity, and of non-existence brought “Russian culture” into a state of siege, into the desire for a “great war”.

The absence of a “common yardstick”⁴⁴ has always allowed great Russian culture to profess a sceptical, conscious moral relativism. “Morality exists for insiders only”. For “others”, instead of morality, there is war, rape, murder, captivity, betrayal, hatred, lies: a “great” ethical deafness. The spiritual forests and swamps, the “endless expanses” of the Russian character in “great Russian culture leave no place for values. There people don’t build, don’t live, they don’t think about the future. Culture does not cultivate rationality and pragmatism (it even scorns it), does not recognise property, the value of labor and a work ethic, does not know and does not write (sing, draw) about human rights; it mocks the desire for success, professes to despise money, does not like (or fears) the concept of freedom, interpreting it as an attack on “greatness”. “Great Russian culture” is a guard who marks the borders of “Russia” and protects it from any civilisation. “Great Russian culture” is a badly, but bizarrely built fence, adorned with reflective panels. Some of them are like a mirror: the reader or viewer can see their own reflection in it from the outside, endow it with their own meanings, give it something that did not exist in “great Russian culture”. Other panels simply do not transmit light. Because at its heart, behind “great Russian culture”, lies impenetrable hellish darkness.

Moreover, in “great Russian culture”, people don’t laugh. There is satire, social sarcasm is also possible, but never laughter and carnival, never humour, never light irony or self-irony which does not seek to edify. “Great Russian culture” creates an image of a hard life, meaningless, not particularly necessary, which is lived reluctantly or with difficulty, or out of obligation. Life is not for joy. There is nothing funny about it, and nor can there be. Everything is serious and monumental, like the mausoleum of the beloved leader.

⁴³ Block, Alexander. 1918. “Scythians”.

⁴⁴ Tyutchev, Fedor. 1866. “Russia cannot be understood with the mind”

If the “great Russian culture” did not proclaim the “Russians” as a superior race, it was only because it itself had not yet fully decided what “Russians” were. And also because it proclaimed not so much a race, as a spiritual guideline, which determines the level of morality and spiritual development of all other cultures. “Great Russian culture” despised and despises others – “foreigners”, aliens, “blacks”, “simpletons”, “narrow-eyed”, “Asians”, Jews, Ukrainians, Finns, Estonians, “Anglo-Saxons”, “Pandos” (Americans).

The special path of the “great Russian culture” consists in the fact that it constantly seeks God, ignoring the Holy Scriptures. Many cultures have gone through this challenge and left it behind. ‘Great Russian culture’, though, has never paused on this path: it has sought God for centuries, placing different masks on Him that serve the interests of ‘Russian greatness’.

There is nothing inside “great Russian culture”. Nothing special or requiring a specific different scale. Just an ordinary, quite commonplace phenomenon that may or may not be of interest to specialists. It’s worth peering beneath its lid to see those others who also have the right to their own history and culture, but who for now are killing Ukrainians, forgetting that they are not Russians themselves, but Chechens, Dagestanis, Buryats, Tuvans, Tatars, Yakuts, Adyghe people. If cancellation-boycott-quarantine will help these peoples return to themselves, one of the most unedifying stories in the history of colonialism may yet come to an end.